

Judges

The Authorship and Dating

Tradition cites Samuel as the writer. However, internal evidence provides little information concerning the human author of Judges.

Directly tied to authorship is the book's dating. First, the phrase "In those days *there was no king in Israel*" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) gives the indication that Israel had at least entered the Kingdom era. This would therefore suggest a date after the inauguration of Saul in 1051 B.C. Second, the book indicates that the Jebusites were still living in Jerusalem (1:29). Considering David, the 2nd King of Israel (1011-1071BC), removed the Jebusites early in his Kingship (2 Sam 5:6-16; 1 Chron. 11:4) in 1004BC, further suggests a dating after 1004BC. However, a couple of passages remain. First, although David officially expelled the Jebusites from Jerusalem some remained in Jerusalem through the time of Solomon (2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Kings 9:20,21). Secondly, 18:30 states "*And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.*" This captivity seems to refer to Israel's Assyrian captivity which took place in 721 BC. However a post 721 B.C. dating is not conclusive considering that verse's reference may be describing the invasion of Dan and not the entire land.¹ Definite conclusions concerning both the authorship and dating are unlikely."²

The dating of the book's material is less complex. The first judge is described as Caleb's nephew Othneil (Judges 3:9) placing a beginning date shortly after Israel's conquest of Canaan in 1406-5 B.C. However, sufficient time must have passed in order to allow for Israel's settled idolatry (Judges 3:7). Given this information the rule of these 13 consecutive judges began around 1350's B.C. and finished shortly before the crowing of Saul in 1051 B.C.

The Recipients

The book of was written for the nation of Israel. Given the content it seems reasonable to assume that the book was written to a generation living during the United Kingdom era (1051-971 B.C.).

The Purpose

Judges was written to not only record Israel's past failure of faith but also to challenge future generations toward obedient faith in their forgiving God.³ The author's selection of faithless events during a time "when there was no king" and to an audience which lived under a king may have also formed an answer to those of the author's day who may have said "those were the good ole days."⁴

¹ Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). 302.

² Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House, ed. *New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999). 304.

³ *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Howard F. Vos Charles F Pfeiffer, John Rea(Chicago: Moody Press, 1975). 974.

⁴ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament a Commentary on Genesis-Malichi*(Grand Rapids: Baker Acedemics, 1999). 120.

The Message

The book is divided into three sections including an introduction, review of past Judges, and epilogue. God had entered into covenant with Israel promising tremendous blessing for obedience as well as certain judgment for disobedience (Deut.28-30). Before Israel entered Canaan, God commanded the nation to destroy all of the Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-4). However, after entering the land (Joshua) the nation failed to remove the Canaanite influence (Judges 1:1-36; 3:5-7; cf. Psalm 106:30-41). The impact of Israel's failure is recognized in the book's introductory section (Judges 1:1-3:6). In the second section the author reviews the efforts of 13 past judges (Judges 3:7-16:31). Although the author names 13 judges he singles out 7 providing an introduction, development and conclusion of their ministry. In each of the 7 reviews (excepting Samson), God's gracious deliverance forms the focus.⁵ The last section records Israel's continued idolatry, civil conflict and family breakdown (17:1-21:25).

The Theme

Several themes can be traced throughout Judges including family failure as well as God's faithfulness to covenant. However, the most prominent theme is Israel's disobedience.

⁵ Ibid. 109-13.

Outline of Judges

I. Introduction 1:1-3:6

- A. Early Victories and Failures 1:1-2:10
 - 1. Judah Defeats Bezek 1:1-7
 - 2. Judah Defeats Jerusalem and Hebron 1:8-10
 - 3. Caleb captures Debir 1:11-15
 - 4. Judah captures Hill Country 1:16-21
 - 5. Joseph Captures Bethel 1:22-26
 - 6. Israel Failed to Remove Canaanites 1:27-36
 - 7. Yahweh's Judgment through Canaanites 2:1-5
 - 8. Joshua Dies 2:6-10
- B. Rebellion 2:11-3:6
 - 1. Israel Worships Baal 2:11-15
 - 2. Yahweh Promises Limited Deliverance 2:16-23
 - 3. Israel's Intermarriage Brings Bondage 3:1-6

II. The Judges of Israel 3:7-16:31

- A. Othniel 3:7-11
- B. Ehud 3:12-30
 - 1. Israel serves Eglon Eighteen Years 3:12-14
 - 2. Ehud slays Eglon with Daggar 3:15-22
 - 3. Ehud and Israel Slay Moabites 3:26-30
- C. Shamgar 3:31
- D. Deborah and Barak 4:1-5:31
 - 1. Israel Serves Jabin 20 Years 4:1-3
 - 2. Deborah Encourages Barak to War 4:4-10
 - 3. Yahweh Delivers Israel Through Barak 4:11-16
 - 4. Sisera Slain by a Woman 4:17-22
 - 5. Son's of Israel Destroy Jabin 4:23-24
 - 6. Deborah Praises Yahweh 5:1-31
- E. Gideon 6:1-8:32
 - 1. Midian Oppresses Israel 6:1-10
 - 2. Angel of Yahweh Visits Gideon 6:11-18
 - 3. Gideon Prepares Food for Angel 6:19-24
 - 4. Gideon Destroys Baal And Asherah 6:25-27
 - 5. Joash Defends Gideon 6:28-32
 - 6. Midianites Threaten Israel 6:33-35
 - 7. Yahweh Instructs Gideon Through fleece 6:36-40
 - 8. Yahweh Chooses 300 of Gideon's Men 7:1-8
 - 9. Encouraged Gideon Prepares Israel 7:9-18
 - 10. Gideon's Victory Over Midianites 7:19-25
 - 11. Gideon Subsides Ephraim's Complaint 8:1-3
 - 12. Succoth and Penuel Refuse Gideon 8:4-9
 - 13. Gideon Captures Zebah & Zalmunna 8:10-12
 - 14. Gideon Punishes Succoth and Penuel 8:13-17

15. Gideon Slays Zebah and Zalmunna 8:18-21
16. Gideon makes Golden Ephod 8:22-27
17. Gideon's Death and Israel's Idolatry 8:28-32
- F. Abimelech 9:1-57
 1. Abimelech's Climb to Power 9:1-6
 2. Jotham's Parabolic Complaint against Abimelech 9:7-21
 3. Schechem and Gaal Taunt Abimelech 9:22-29
 4. Abimelech Destroys Shechem and Gaal 9:30-49
 5. Abimelech's Death at Thebez 9:50-57
- G. Tola Judges Israel for 23 Years 10:1-2
- H. Jair Judges Israel for 22 Years 10:3-4
- I. Jephthah 10:6-12:7
 1. Israel's Conflict with Ammonites 10:6-9
 2. Israel Prays and Yahweh Answers 10:10-18
 3. Jephthah Becomes a Judge 11:1-11
 4. Jephthah's Message to the Ammonites 11:12-28
 5. Jephthah's Tragic Vow 11:29-33
 6. Jephthah's Tragic Vow Fulfilled 11:34-40
 7. Jephthah Defeats Ammonites and Dies 12:1-7
- J. Ibzan Judges Israel 7 Years 12:8-10
- K. Elon Judges Israel 10 Years 12:11-12
- L. Abdon Judges Israel 8 Years 12:13-15
- M. Samson 13:1-16:31
 1. Toward the Birth of Samson 13:1-25
 - a. Angel Promises Barren Woman a Son 13:1-7
 - b. Angel Appears with Further Instruction 13:8-14
 - c. Manoah (Husband) Worships Lord Before Angel 13:15-20
 - d. Wife gives Advice to Manoah 13:21-23
 - e. Birth of Samson 13:24-25
 2. The Ministry and Death of Samson 14:1-16:31
 - a. Samson Desires Philistine Woman 14:1-4
 - b. Samson gets Honey from Dead Lion 14:5-9
 - c. Riddle for Philistines 14:10-20
 - d. Samson Burns Philistine's Crop 15:1-8
 - e. Judah Surrenders Samson to Philistines 15:9-13
 - f. Samson slays 1000 Philistines 15:14-20
 - g. Samson finds Woman in Gaza 16:1-3
 - h. Samson's Play with Delilah 16:4-14
 - i. Delilah Learns of Samson's Strength 16:15-17
 - j. Samson taken Prisoner by Philistines 16:18-22
 - k. Samson Shamed before Philistines 16:23-27
 - l. Samson's Suicide in Dagon Temple 16:28-31

III. Epilogue 17:1-21:25

- A. Idolatry Persists 17:1-18:31
 1. Micah of Ephraim makes Idol 17:1-6
 2. Micah Hires Levite Priest 17:7-13

3. Danites Search for Land 18:1-13
4. Danites Take Micah's Idols and Priest 18:14-26
5. Danites Take Laish and Establish Worship 18:27-31
- B. Civil Warfare 19:1-21:25
 1. Levite Follows Concubine to Father-in-Law 19:1-9
 2. Levite Leaves Father-in-Law with Concubine 19:10-15
 3. Levite's Concubine Raped in Gibeah 19:16-26
 4. Levite Sends Dismembered Concubine to Tribes 19:27-30
 5. Israel Gathers at Mizpah 20:1-7
 6. Israel Resolves to Punish Gibeah 20:8-11
 7. Son's of Benjamin Desire Battle 20:12-17
 8. Israel Wars with Benjamin 3 Days 20:18-35
 9. Israel Defeats Benjamin 20:36-48
 10. Israel Cuts off Benjamin 21:1-7
 11. Israel spares 400 virgins for Rimmon 21:8-13
 12. Israel secures more Virgins for Benjamin's Survival 21:14-25

Bibliography

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